



Jibanananda: A lingering consciousness

Jibanananda Das is a name unparalleled in Bangla literature; unfortunately, as has been the case of most Bengali poets, his works still remain to be translated for a wider, global audience. The scanty translations available often fail to convey the flavour of his wordplay, and the vivid imageries that he draws in his lines. Perhaps, that is true for all poets, but being 'lost in translation' has been the fate of most of his works.

Bangla literature is rich, and its first step toward reaching a global audience was through Tagore. Yet, even after being one of most iconic of Nobel laureates, Tagore himself is not as widely read as one would assume.

Although immortalised through his poetry, Das's entire gamut of literature is beyond belief. The prolific author penned poetry and prose, much of which was published posthumously. The shy Jibanananda never published in his lifetime any of the proses he had written, and unfortunate as it seems, his short stories and novels still remain overshadowed by the majesty of his poetic prowess. That, however, does not mean that his literary works in other forms are any inferior.

My introduction to Das was through poetry, and I perceive him as a poet still. While critics compare him to the likes of Tagore, Nazrul and a few others — to me, he is truly the 'purest poet.'

All his life, Das disdained such generalisations. But even I, as a Jibanananda aficionado, cannot help

but label him as such!

In the preface to 'Shreshtha Kavita' published in 1854, he wrote —

My poems or the poet of these verses have been called the lonely poet of the loneliest of poets by some; some have said that these poems are primarily of nature or full of historical or social consciousness, others have labelled them as poems of resignation; still others consider

discover Jibanananda's poetry through the most celebrated love poems. For me, that was a disappointing start; my limitation!

As someone passing a watershed moment that marked my introduction to adulthood, I found his romantic poetry simple; his heroines lacking the panache.

The image of Porna overpowered Bonolota when it came to seeking solace in my heart. The images of her engrossed in a hearty conversation with her male friend, overwhelmed the jealousy Jibanananda felt for Suranjana's male acquaintances.

True, I was solitary in my discovery of Das; my only companion 'Jibanananda Dasher Shreshtha Kavita' [Edited by Abdul Mannan Syed]. But I knew there was something more to the words, it was clear that the embarrassing language barrier made it impossible for me to fully grasp what he was saying.

I knew poetry is something that should be read and re-read until the imageries become clear and the conceit reveal themselves. And re-read a few times more. And I never gave up.

I am neither a poet nor a connoisseur. I struggle with meter or rhyme, or what separates Shakespearean sonnets from Bangla ones.

Two decades since those December nights, I still read the same poetry and find new meaning every single time. But I still cannot let him be, and not conceptualise his works in any one of the 'labels' he despised.



them to be exclusively symbolic; completely derived from the unconscious; surrealist and so on. I have noticed many other labels. All of them are partially correct — they do apply to some poems or some phases, but no one of them explain all of my poetry.

JIBANANANDA, & I

It was taken that I would first seek to

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“ALLAH DOES NOT WANT TO PLACE YOU IN DIFFICULTY, BUT HE WANTS TO PURIFY YOU, AND TO BESTOW HIS GRACE ON YOU THAT YOU MAY BE GRATEFUL.”

The Quran 05:06